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ILLUSIONISTS AND PUPPET MASTERS: ADOPTION PROFILES OF NEW MANAGEMENT MODELS

The ability of organisations to incorporate new knowledge, including management models, is imperative for competitiveness and survival. Examples of management models that spread globally for their appealing promises abound, including such proposals as management by objectives, total quality management, business process reengineering, and diversity management, among many others.

Management models comprise a practical dimension, specifically the techniques, rules and routines employed to improve work processes and results, and a discursive dimension, namely written or spoken text conveying persuasive arguments about the relevance, adequacy and contribution of the management model to attain desired goals. The potential for management models to take root in different national and organisational contexts strongly relies on its rhetoric, that is, the appeal and appropriateness of the model's discourse that facilitates understanding and confidence in the value of its practices. A mismatch between organisations' utilization of a management model's rhetoric versus its actual practise often occurs.

Organisations frequently display inconsistent, or what Meyer and Rowan call "decoupled" behaviours towards their discourse and practice.

Successful integration of new management models hinges on an organisation's capacity to creatively adapt them to the

national culture, as well as to the organisation's values, problems, and established practices. These adaptation efforts must be directed at both discourse and practice. Integration of these dimensions is necessary for an organisation's understanding of what is required for adaptation.

In this article, we propose a framework of different behavioural profiles for new model adoption and adaptation. In particular, we argue that organisations can activate distinct (potentially decoupled) adoption behaviours towards new model discourse and practice. Moreover, their responses may go beyond simple acceptance or rejection. Their responses may encompass varying adaptation efforts to their local context. We illustrate our framework with an empirical study of the adoption and adaptation of the American-emanated "Diversity Management Model" in six large organisations in Portugal.

WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT MODEL ADOPTION

A rational perspective emphasises the practical dimension of a management model (techniques, rules and routines). Managers are viewed as rational decision-makers who adopt management models of proven technical effectiveness. The quality of a new management model is judged on how it works.

Yet, management models comprise a discursive dimension, that is, a set of arguments that frame its use.

An institutional perspective contends that, regardless of a model's effectiveness, organisations may adopt it because of

its symbolic value, that is, to secure legitimacy and a positive public image within a given context. Rhetoric assumes a pivotal role in explaining how a new model complies with institutionalised expectations (e.g., effectiveness and efficiency) and strongly held values (e.g., sustainability, democracy, equality, and justice). Discourse can also be instrumental in publicising new model adoption among external constituencies. Symbolic gains are made through external legitimacy and a positive public image.

According to the cultural perspective, discourse helps managers create collective meanings that justify new management philosophies that rationalise the usefulness of the new practices. This facilitates internal understanding, acceptance, and support for its implementation, thus enabling a model to attain technical/performance gains.

A mismatch between an organisation's discourse and action can occur when an organisation announces the latest management model to impress external stakeholders who desire novelty. A positive public image and reputation is forged even when actual practice falls short. Practices are adopted only temporarily, superficially, or ceremonially.

These "decoupled" responses can occur in different combinations. For instance, organisations often embrace certain promising management practices but do not perceive the need to adopt the corresponding discourse to legitimise practices and secure their members' support.

WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT MODEL ADAPTATION

The cultural perspective emphasizes that new management models simultaneously shape and are shaped by the culture of the adopting organization.

A new model's discourse must be adapted to fit national and organisational contexts. Critical interpretation of the new discourse is required to socially (re)construct the need for change and the adequacy of the proposed practices, providing an appropriate interpretative context and infusing the new practices with value and meaning. New practices that make cultural sense are more easily and swiftly transitioned from formal/written procedures to enacted practices that are gradually internalised. Moreover, adapting a new model's discourse to resonate with national and local cultures imbues it with value to both internal and external audiences, thus reinforcing legitimacy and reputation.

THE COMPLEX REALITY OF MODEL ADOPTION AND ADAPTATION

Inconsistent adoption and adaptation of a management model's practical and discursive dimensions can be deliberate. It may be an exercise to manipulate perceptions and expectations, or a decoupling strategy for responding to incongruent institutional pressures while avoiding disruptive and inconvenient technical change. It may also be the result of challenges posed by contending ideologies, traditions, interests or power dynamics,

both within and outside the organisation. The “institutional duality” faced by multinational (MNC) subsidiaries is an example, as they need to maintain legitimacy within both the host country and the parent company. So, the subsidiary may formally (or discursively) comply with headquarters' (HQ) prescribed management models, but avoid actual implementation of corresponding practices due to contrary local demands and expectations. A mismatch between management discourse and practice may also be temporary, occurring between the moment in which intentions are communicated and practices are, at last, adopted.

On the other hand, managers often make decisions with little conscious reflection on their appropriateness or impact. They cannot always perceive nor control the chain of events precipitated by their decisions. Decoupled responses may thus be unintentional. Moreover, organisational responses to new ideas can be nuanced and complex, going beyond simple acceptance or rejection.

Following the previous insights, we consider three key organisational responses towards the adoption and adaptation of new management models, namely “uncritical reproduction”, “contextual adaptation”, and “local resistance”. The first and last express polar points of a continuum, with “contextual adaptation” representing a well-adjusted middle ground which may include selective adoption and creative adaptation but precludes partial or incomplete adoption and inadequate or

insufficient adaptation.

"Uncritical reproduction" typifies the plain copy of the new model (discourse and/or practice) with no local adjustment. The organisation disregards the need to make the model fit its specificities or makes insufficient or inadequate adaptation efforts. This strict reproduction of management practices is commonly reported among subsidiaries subject to foreign HQ dictates. But local organisations may also uncritically adopt foreign practices deemed of universal value and superiority, either epitomised by prominent companies or prescribed by management consultants, gurus and business schools.

"Contextual adaptation" refers to the mindful and intentional organisational-level adaptation of the new management model (discourse and/or practice) so that it is better adjusted to national and organisational specificities.

Early adopters in a given institutional context are expected to perceive a greater misfit between new a model and local circumstances. Hence, more extensive changes occur than with later adopters. Some degree of adaptation to an organisation's singular culture, needs and goals is always advised if the organisation is to benefit from the sought-after technical/performance and symbolic gains.

Finally, "local resistance" happens when managers dismiss a new model's discourse and/or practices, either as an intentional decoupling strategy, or in connection to issues such as fear of uncertainty, preservation of the status quo,

organisational cynicism developed from past negative experiences, or established organisational patterns that inhibit the consideration of the model.

NEW MODEL ADOPTION AND ADAPTATION: A SPECTRUM OF PROFILES

Based on the arguments expounded so far, we propose that organisations may enact three distinct key responses, uncritical reproduction, contextual adaptation, and local resistance, towards either or both the discourse and the practices of a new management model. The combination of these results in nine theoretically viable adoption profiles, three of which are consistent while the remaining six represent inconsistent, or decoupled, adoption behaviours.

Figure 1. New management model adoption profiles

		New Model Practice		
		Uncritical reproduction	Contextual adaptation	Rejection
New Model Discourse	Uncritical reproduction	UK-Meal Clone	Parrot	US-Material Illusionist
	Contextual adaptation	JP-Automotive Puppet Master	US-Software Interpreter	Public Relations
	Rejection	Mime	PT-Drinks Action Figure	PT-Pharma Snob

Figure 1 depicts the nine adoption profiles and the position of the case studies we present as illustrations. Table 1 summarizes the attributes and expected outcomes of each.

Table 1. New management model adoption profiles

	Adoption profile Description	Internal stakeholders	Expected consequences External stakeholders	Processes and results
Clone	Blind and uncritical adoption of new management models; discourse and practice are exactly replicated, neglecting local context	New discourse and practices seen as odd, meaningless or locally irrelevant	Possible image boost among global stakeholders; local stakeholders may not relate to publicised philosophy and practice	The organisation will benefit little from the new model in terms of productivity and effectiveness
Parrot	Uncritical reproduction of discourse, with contextualised adaptation of corresponding practice	New discourse seen as odd or locally irrelevant; adapted practices may be jeopardised by lack of validating discourse	Possible image boost among global stakeholders; local stakeholders may not relate to publicised philosophy	Full benefits of new practices may be stunted or delayed
Illusionist	Uncritical reproduction of discourse, but rejection of corresponding practice	New discourse seen as odd, meaningless or locally irrelevant; perceived mismatch between progressive discourse and conflicting practice; future scepticism	Possible image boost among global stakeholders; local stakeholders may not relate to publicised philosophy and practice; risk to reputation if perceptions of hypocrisy leak	No productivity and effectiveness benefits; internal perceptions of hypocrisy may jeopardise other processes and results
Puppet Master	Contextual adaptation of discourse, but uncritical adoption of corresponding practice; familiar words used to soften radical or unpopular practices	Members understand the new discourse as relevant, but perceive new practices as radical and clashing with custom; organisation may be seen as disloyal and manipulative, inciting resistance or retaliation	Temporary enhancement of image and reputation; organisation simultaneously seen as cosmopolitan and attuned to local concerns and stakeholders; risk to reputation if perceptions of disloyalty leak	Little productivity and effectiveness benefits; internal perceptions of disloyalty and manipulation may jeopardise processes and results
Public Relations	Contextual adaptation of discourse, but rejection of corresponding practice	Members understand the new discourse as relevant, but it may become empty rhetoric for lack of practical repercussions	Temporary enhancement of image and reputation; organisation simultaneously seen as cosmopolitan and attuned to local concerns and stakeholders; risk to reputation if perceptions of hypocrisy leak	No productivity and effectiveness benefits; internal perceptions of hypocrisy may jeopardise processes and results
Mime	Uncritical reproduction of practices, but rejection of validating discourse	Members may feel intimidated by the unexplained new practices; perceiving them as radical and clashing with custom, they may thwart implementation	Failing to publicise the adoption of new practices, the organisation misses opportunity to boost image and reputation	Little productivity and effectiveness benefits; internal perceptions of disregard and neglect may jeopardise processes and results
Action Figure	Contextual adaptation of practice, but rejection of validating discourse	Members may not support potentially adapted practice for lack of a framing discourse	Failing to publicise the adoption of new practices, the organisation misses opportunity to boost image and reputation	Full benefits of new practices may be stunted or delayed
Snob	Rejection of both the discourse and practice of new model	Members are kept from new knowledge; immersed in outdated discourses and practices, creativity and innovation may be stifled	Public image and reputation among increasingly demanding stakeholders may suffer	Organisational processes risk obsolescence facing uncertainty and change
Interpreter	Contextual adaptation of both new management model discourse and practice	Members understand the new model's discourse and evaluate the practice as relevant; the new model is smoothly implemented	Enhancement of image and reputation; organisation simultaneously seen as cosmopolitan and attuned to local concerns and stakeholders	The organisation may benefit from the full potential and contribution of the new management model

The first eight profiles stand out as lacking because they fail to appropriately adapt, or even convincingly adopt, either the underlying discourse or the inherent practice of the new model. The Clone organisation rushes towards an uncritical and decontextualised adoption of both a new model's discourse and practice. It may be seeking the latest management fashion, emulating successful companies, or following strict HQ directives. The new discourse could be perceived as odd and meaningless, failing to persuade members of the relevance of new practices. Neither framed by convincing arguments nor adapted to the organisation's existing routines, the new practices risk being only superficially or temporarily implemented, consequently failing to deliver technical/performance gains. Public image may improve among international audiences familiar with the innovative discourse, but probably not among local constituencies.

The Parrot organisation consciously adapts new practices to the local context, but ascribes less value to discourse, strictly reproducing and publicising the new progressive rhetoric. While the technical fit resulting from adapted practices is essential for reaping the model's technical/performance gains, the lack of a contextualised and meaningful discourse that provides interpretative validity may confuse employees. This delays, or frustrates full implementation and thus reduces its impact.

The Illusionist organisation also uncritically reproduces the new fashionable rhetoric, but disregards the new practices altogether. Consequently, progressive statements coexist with outdated practices. This window-dressing strategy is associated with the creation of an illusionary reality to conform to global stakeholders' expectations. Models that do not really match the organisation's core goals are adopted. This leads to interpretations of organisational hypocrisy and scepticism towards future initiatives. External scrutiny may spread this perception to the outside, seriously damaging corporate reputation. Additionally, the model's technical/performance gains are dashed as new practices are avoided.

The Puppet Master profile camouflages new unpopular or disruptive practices by wrapping them in a friendly, well-adjusted rhetoric. This rhetoric is designed either to mask a tough reality or to suppress defiance. Despite the adjusted rhetoric, employees may be upset by the new practices, assess the organisation as disloyal and resist or retaliate, thus undermining the model's technical/performance gains. If such perceptions spread to the outside, an organisation's reputation may also suffer.

In the Public Relations profile, new model discourse is locally interpreted and adapted. As a result, it is expected to be understood and assimilated by organisational members, and improve an organisation's external prestige. But, again,

the model's practices fail to be implemented, either deliberately, or due to lack of resources, or due to a lack of the necessary bargaining power. No technical/performance benefits will arise, turning the adapted discourse into cheap or empty rhetoric.

The Mime organisation uncritically reproduces popular new practices while ignoring its accompanying discourse. These new alien practices, unsupported by persuasive arguments, may not fit into everyday processes and routines. They can take on a coercive quality that intimidate and frustrate members.

Employee resistance, on top of potential technical misfit, is likely to curtail implementation. The symbolic gains that might arise from publicly announcing a new model adoption among external audiences will also be sacrificed.

In turn, the Action Figure profile recognises the need to locally adapt new practices. But it still neglects the role of discourse in leveraging action. Again, the resulting interpretative void may lead members to misunderstand their leaders' underlying motivation, underestimate new practices, and ultimately resist them. This compromises the desired technical/performance results and symbolic benefits.

In the Snob profile, institutional pressures dictate an association with a new fashionable or otherwise commended management model. However, the organisation maintains a supercilious attitude that precludes genuine endorsement of either its discourse or its practices. A diluted version of

the new model's discourse is concocted to produce the illusion of adoption, while practices are clearly rebuffed. This behaviour is unlikely to ensure success in a globalised economy, where the ability to incorporate new knowledge is vital for both economic competitiveness and institutional legitimacy.

Finally, the central cell represents the ideal, well-adjusted profile. The Interpreter is characterised by critical and creative reception of the new model where both discourse and practices are critically evaluated and adapted to interact with established systems, and to suit the local culture. The appropriately interpreted discourse fits the prevailing organisational values and norms. This promotes members' understanding of the model's merits and adequacy to organisational needs and goals. Thus, acceptance and commitment to its implementation is enhanced. The new and adapted practices are smoothly integrated into the existing structures and routines. They become gradually internalised, allowing the organisation to benefit from the model's technical/performance gains. The model's symbolic gains will also be garnered as the new contextualised discourse is communicated inside and outside the organisation. The organisation will be publicly recognised for its progressive management while meeting local values and expectations.

AN EMPIRICAL ILLUSTRATION

We illustrate six of these profiles, as indicated in Figure 1, with a study of the adoption and adaptation of Diversity Management in large organisations in Portugal. Our cases, described in Table 2 under fictional names, are drawn from the 500 largest companies in Portugal. Of the 54 companies that included workplace diversity-related contents in their corporate websites, six agreed to be studied. They share exposure to international competition, making them particularly receptive to foreign management knowledge, while still susceptible to local institutional pressures.

The central argument in Diversity Management is that, in a global economy, organisations should voluntarily and strategically promote inclusive workplaces because they will benefit from a diverse workforce's knowledge, skills, and perspectives, which potentially contribute to more effective decision-making, higher innovation, and improved responsiveness to customers who may themselves be diverse. The recommended practices of the Diversity Management model comprise diversity training and audits, mentoring and networking programmes, diversity councils, and work-life balance initiatives. A persuasive discourse communicating the organisation's pledge towards diversity (e.g., through ethical codes, values statements, and websites) is advocated to generate internal legitimacy and commitment, as well as external reputation.

Table 2. Six case studies - companies' main features

Company	Activity	Ownership/age	Approx. no. employees	Other features
US-Material	High-tech components	International company (U.S. origin); Portuguese subsidiary acquired 1970	250	Extremely challenged by international competition
JP-Automotive	Automotive components	Global company (Japanese origin); Portuguese subsidiary founded 1986	900	Extremely challenged by international competition Several downsizing processes
PT-Drinks	Soft beverages	National company; founded 1890	2,500	Well-known in Portugal Local activity (expansion to Africa) Recent downsizing
UK-Meal	Contract catering service	International company (U.K. origin); Portuguese subsidiary founded 1995	5,000	70 units (company restaurants, restaurants, and cafeterias) High domestic and international competition
PT-Pharma	Pharmaceutical products	National company; founded 1975	150	Local activity Unknown to the general public High international competition
US-Software	Software development	Global company (U.S. origin); Portuguese subsidiary founded 1990	300	Awarded Best Place to Work Awarded best subsidiary in the group Well-known worldwide

The adoption of diversity management by organisations in Portugal presents a compelling illustration of new model adoption for a number of reasons. Firstly, effective workforce diversity management in a globalised economy is, not only technically relevant, but also carries a high degree of social desirability to the point where it can be considered a management fashion. It has, thus, high potential to disseminate. This is reinforced by the strong institutional pressure for organisations to support diversity, with repercussions on their reputation. In addition, the concept of diversity is socially constructed, and varies significantly across cultures, accentuating the importance of appropriate local adaptation. Moreover, Portugal and the U.S.A. are persistent and significantly culturally dissimilar, also stressing the need for translation. Finally, Portuguese managers are notably predisposed to adapting foreign management fashions to their local attributes and needs.

In our research, we found evidence of the three key responses regarding the adoption and adaptation of diversity management: uncritical reproduction, contextual adaptation, and local resistance. All six companies ostensibly espoused diversity management, but the extent of local appropriation was very dissimilar. This seemed to be dependent on their mixed motivations and outlooks on diversity.

Table 3. Six case studies - six profiles

Company	Diversity discourse	Diversity practice	Translation efforts
UK-Meal <i>Clone</i>	Diversity discourse imposed by British HQ, present in the corporate website, internal media and flyers.	Diversity initiatives originated in British HQ, uncommon in Portugal; e.g., diversity training considered by local managers as irrelevant; whistleblowing line, never used. Some practices inconsistent with discourse prevail (e.g. women and ethnic minorities dominate production functions but are rare at management positions).	Uncritically reproduced diversity discourse. Uncritically reproduced diversity practices. Conflicting practices and stereotypes.
US-Material <i>Illusionist</i>	Diversity discourse imposed by U.S. HQ, present in intranet, notice boards and flyers. Diversity training developed and imposed by HQ. Members seem unaware and/or uninterested in the subject.	No diversity initiatives. Practices inconsistent with the diversity discourse (e.g. exclusion of women from production functions and significant mobility barriers for people with disabilities).	Uncritically reproduced diversity discourse. Rejected diversity practice; existing practices conflict with imported discourse.
JP-Automotive <i>Puppet Master</i>	Diversity and equality discourses integrated into the social responsibility domain, evident in the local ethical code. Members understand the message but find it does not address their current concerns.	Diversity initiatives advised by Japanese HQ (e.g. imported work-life balance policies, hearing-impaired employees in the assembly lines), perceived by member as eluding the real problem of imminent redundancy.	Contextually adapted diversity discourse. Uncritically reproduced diversity practice, perceived as irrelevant.
PT-Drinks <i>Action Figure</i>	Discourse distorted to that of equality, present in the corporate website, intranet, annual sustainability reports, ethical code of conduct, and notice boards. Some managers espouse a non-official diversity	Diversity initiatives focused on local issues (work-life balance and gender balance in top positions). Some inconsistent outdated practices lingered (older and unconventionally looking people are deemed	Rejection of the diversity discourse. Official adherence to the traditional equality discourse. Some contextually adapted

	discourse but consider it too advanced for the Portuguese context.	less adequate; women are shunned from specific production functions).	diversity practices, but persistence of conflicting outmoded practices and stereotypes.
PT-Pharma <i>Snob</i>	Equality and non-discrimination discourse required by SA 8000 certification, present in the corporate website, chart of values and flyers. No further efforts to explain it to members, who appear to be unaware and/or uninterested in the subject.	No diversity initiatives. Homogeneous workforce overall, with the few employees of ethnic minorities occupying low skilled jobs. Evidence of gender segregation (administrative roles limited to women and transportation jobs to men).	Rejection of both the diversity discourse and practice. Adherence to the traditional equality discourse, but persistence of conflicting practices.
US-Software <i>Interpreter</i>	Diversity discourse from U.S. HQ mixed with local equality rhetoric, manifest in the local corporate website and ethical code. Multiple intranet contents developed by HQ (including training sessions) communicate the diversity discourse. Members consider it relevant and appropriate.	Diversity practices are mostly imported from U.S. HQ (e.g., diversity features in managers' assessment; telecommuting jobs for people with physical disability; creation of Diversity Council) but reveal emphasis on local issues (gender imbalance and work-life balance initiatives).	Contextual adaptation of diversity discourse. Contextual adaptation of diversity practices, aligned with local concerns.

The three companies importing diversity management solely out of compliance with HQ policy or certification requirements either ignored diversity practices, or exhibited minor or uncritical adoption, with no adaptation to the local context. The discourse itself was also either strictly reproduced from HQ or merely ceremonially endorsed. Conversely, when the benefits of diversity management were acknowledged and purposefully sought, there was greater effort in translating the discourse to the Portuguese context and aligning the practices with the local interests.

We next provide more detailed evidence for illustrating the six profiles. Table 3 summarises the analysis for each company.

The Clone profile is represented by UK-Meal, who uncritically replicated the HQ-mandated diversity discourse. The local website proclaimed “[UK-Meal] values and recognises each employee’s diversity and contribution”. Although some managers viewed this as incongruent with local sensitivities, the adherence to the diversity discourse was a conscious choice rather than a passive response. A top manager explained: “this innovative discourse ensures a better way to distinguish ourselves from the local competition”, helping to attract the best talent to this “more traditional, and not particularly high-tech company”. However, the uncritically reproduced diversity rhetoric did not resonate with the staff, who saw it as outlandish and unrelated to local concerns. The company’s

HR Director had a critical view:

I think we shouldn't be adopting practices just because they are applied in another country, such as the U.S. (...) Our workers know they have to prepare meals and serve them to clients. And they have to do it efficiently. But they don't care if some very nice things are written somewhere... (...) There are several management theories, which came and go, and some people want to take advantage of them, to show they are innovative. But do they really work here? [UK-Meal HR Director]

So too were diversity practices uncritically transferred from HQ with no local adaptation. UK-Meal implemented measures unfamiliar in Portugal, such as a global whistleblowing phone line, and the recruitment of ex-convicts, while work-life balance initiatives appropriate to a predominantly female workforce, three quarters of whom had small children, were deemed impractical in food production units. And the significant ethnic heterogeneity did not incite any integration practices.

The Illusionist is illustrated by the MNC subsidiary US-Material, who saw diversity management as locally irrelevant, displaying a purely ceremonial adoption. The company uncritically reproduced the HQ-emanated diversity discourse in its intranet, notice boards and flyers with messages such as: "Win from within: To value and encourage cultural differences". Adaptations to the local context were seen as pointless. A middle manager said:

These diversity statements conform to the U.S. institutional expectations and seek to impress global investors and

clients, but fail to impact the Portuguese society, which is more concerned with the growing cleavage between the few ones who have a lot and the large majority who has very little.

No diversity practices were actually implemented, and US-Material employees were displeased that the diversity discourse did not translate into practice: "There's that talk of equality and diversity, but what I see here is a tendency to get everyone to be the same, not to see the differences." JP-Automotive embodied the Puppet Master. It considered diversity as foreign but had adapted the discourse to emphasise equality and social responsibility, more attuned to the Portuguese audience. The subsidiary's Code of Conduct stated:

The Group is committed to promoting equal opportunities and maintaining a discrimination-free environment (...). Our global and diverse workforce offers varied perspectives and solutions to better serve our clients.

However, diversity practices were carried through from HQ with no further adjustment to local needs. The company had an in-house medical centre, and integrated hearing-impaired individuals in the assembly lines, but failed to provide cultural training for staff placed in the company's African offices, for example. Employees could not see how the practices adopted responded to their needs and concerns. The imported diversity initiatives failed to address local difficulties, like the impending threat of unemployment, resulting in employee cynicism towards the whole issue:

Many people just don't care anymore. They say 'This is going to close. Next year we'll no longer be here'. And so, they let themselves go down, they give less of themselves, they no longer participate as before... And those things [organisational values and principles] no longer matter. We don't care. [JP-Automotive employee]

PT-Drinks epitomised the Action Figure profile. Top managers espoused the diversity rhetoric, but thought it was too advanced for a Portuguese audience. So, the diversity discourse was effectively resisted, toned down to that of equality. This was supplanted by some diversity initiatives: top and middle management-level selection and promotion practices were specifically aimed at reducing the substantial gender imbalance. And there was also a comprehensive list of work-life balance initiatives that were appreciated across the hierarchy. However, some outmoded practices and stereotypes contradicted the equal opportunities discourse. Women were considered inadequate for some production jobs, older applicants were deemed "less capable to deal with change" (HR Director), and candidates with unconventional appearance were "unsuitable to deal with clients" (PR Director).

The Snob profile is represented by the national PT-Pharma, who displayed the equality and non-discrimination discourse imposed by the SA 8000 standard certification held by the company:

The SA 8000 certification – Our social commitment. [One of the principles is] Respect for difference: Different treatment on the grounds of race, social class, religion and disability is not allowed. [PT-Pharma's chart of values]

This certification was valued for enhancing the company's notoriety and reputation among its corporate customers, but the inherent equality discourse was regarded as having little local impact. PT-Pharma's CEO stated: "Diversity is just another U.S. management fashion (...) Portuguese people are not really concerned with the rights of minorities". So, the diversity discourse was essentially rejected, and the equality rhetoric strictly reproduced for mere certification compliance. This was literally transferred into practice. PT-Pharma's HR Director claimed that decisions were blind to identity attributes:

We don't assess a person from another country, skin colour or religion as a benefit or as a disadvantage to the organisation. Those kinds of features do not differentiate an employee from another. [PT-Pharma's HR Director]

This view of equality as sameness prevented the development of positive measures towards minorities. like employing disabled people or promoting work-life balance, although top managers admitted they were viable.

Finally, the well-adjusted Interpreter profile was manifest in US-Software. This MNC subsidiary strived to produce a version of the diversity discourse that "makes sense locally" (US-Software top manager), emphasising a pledge to equality and associating diversity management to ethics and social responsibility. Although diversity was mandated from HQ, and the impact on external reputation was acknowledged, this was the only company valuing diversity for its intrinsic benefits:

If we have different cultural and educational backgrounds and life experiences, we can offer a wide range of ideas and

perspectives. Additionally, we are better able to understand the culture and satisfy the needs of people from everywhere. (...) I can't see how this company could ever operate without such input of diversity. [US-Software top manager]

US-Software also showed more adjusted diversity practices. The company implemented the diversity initiatives inspired by HQ practices but "they are always critically evaluated and adapted to our local context and needs" (US-Software's HR Director). While some practices were aligned with the parent company's agenda (e.g. managers' performance assessment included their contribution to diversity, and a local Diversity Council was being established), others specifically catered to local employees. The company was committed to providing telecommuting jobs for people with physical disability – a group favoured by European legislation – and aimed to tackle the significant local workforce gender imbalance, where only 25% were female. An impressive set of work-life balance initiatives was designed to respond to employees' needs and preferences, namely a wide range of convenience services and gym activities.

These cases illustrate the variety of organizational responses towards new management model adoption; companies can clearly assume distinct behaviours towards the discourse versus the practices, in a decoupled manner. Moreover, organizations do not simply accept or reject management novelties. They display diverse adaptation efforts. Some of our companies passively accepted the imposed diversity discourse and practices, making no effort to adapt them to the local context, whereas others

tried to adjust the discourse and implement locally relevant practices. Our study highlights the significance of the motivations for adopting the new model in determining these responses. An intrinsic belief in its merits seems pivotal for adoption and local adaptation. Conversely, when the model is adopted out of conformity, there is no incentive to adapt the discourse or even adopt the practices. At best, the uncritical reproduction of the mandated rhetoric and actions may be expected.

Finally, and although we could not illustrate all profiles, our cases show some of the consequences arising from the various approaches to the diversity discourse and practice. Context relevant practices consistent with locally adapted discourse are more effectively transferred to employees' everyday experience. On the contrary, when action lags behind discourse, or when it is seen as inadequate to the local context, employee discontent and cynicism will ensue.

In short, our cases reveal the shortcomings and negative consequences of failing to adopt and suitably adapt both the discourse and the practice of diversity management. The Interpreter profile stands out as the recommended stance towards new model adoption and adaptation, which creates the ideal conditions for the new ideas and practices to take root in the organisation, allowing it to reap the expected benefits that probably motivated adoption the first place. Other profiles will be tenable only temporarily if decoupling

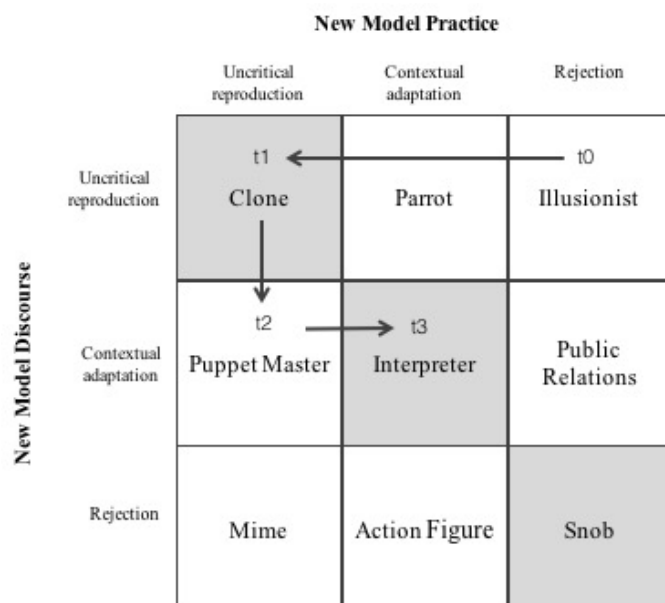
derives from unintended misalignment that is corrected over time. If persistent, they will likely incur the negative consequences described above. This calls to attention the dynamic nature of new model importation, addressed next.

ADOPTION AND ADAPTATION PROFILE DYNAMICS

A 3x3 matrix is of necessity static, its purpose to capture the main standpoints. There is, however, every expectation of progression along profiles over time. Initial responses will inevitably produce outcomes, more or less intentionally, that will elicit further developments. Adoption behaviours, especially when decoupled, are therefore expected to be temporary. Both due to external institutional forces (public opinion, customer demands, external auditing) and internal power dynamics (employee reactions, lower-level managers' actions, resource (un)availability), the fate of adopted models may even acquire a life of its own quite irrespective of leaders' initial intentions. Empirical studies show how the adoption of new models follows an evolutionary process, in which discourse and practice assume alternating roles in making the model accepted and adjusted to the organisation. A possible path for the evolution of an organisation's response towards new model adoption (Figure 2) may start with the uncritical reproduction of the model's rhetoric with no initial attempt to implement its practices (Illusionist profile), perhaps under HQ directives, or craving symbolic

gains. The absence of practical consequences may lead employees to react negatively, and the new model is either abandoned or ceremonial adoption of practices may be enacted. HQ may also push for the implementation of prescribed initiatives, leading the organisation to uncritically reproduce the models' practices and move on to a Clone profile. Implementation of the model's techniques, even if uncritical, may trigger reflection and internal dialogue, facilitating the ongoing development of a more locally adjusted discourse. This positions the organisation in the Puppet Master profile. If initial implementation produces some positive impact, organisational members may become interested in making it more fully adapted to the local culture and established routines, and the company may end up in the more commendable Interpreter profile, where both discourse and practice are contextually adapted.

Figure 2. An illustration of profile dynamics



SUMMARY AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The distinction between discourse and practice, as well as the possibility of discrepancies between them, has been widely discussed in the organisational literature. The importance of adapting both discourse and practice in the process of adopting external knowledge has also been recognised. However, the variety of organisational responses that derive from this realisation tends to be overlooked. Integrating different perspectives on knowledge innovation, we develop a conceptual framework which assumes that organisations can enact distinct, potentially decoupled behaviours towards a new model's discourse and practice. An organisation's response can comprise acceptance, rejection/resistance, but also uncritical reproduction and contextual adaptation to local specificities. Nine possible adoption profiles result, three of which are consistent, the remaining six portraying decoupled importation behaviours. We explore the attributes and ensuing implications of those nine profiles regarding the impact on both internal and external stakeholders, as well as in terms of organizational processes and results.

We illustrate the proposed conceptual framework with an empirical study of the adoption of Diversity Management in six organisations in Portugal, a peripheral country noted for a predisposition to importing foreign models. This study testifies to the practical relevance of the framework, exemplifying six of the proposed profiles. It further

elucidates some of the expected consequences, namely in terms of employee reactions, and suggests that pursuit of the advised Interpreter profile is stimulated by the intrinsic belief in the merits of the new management model. This prompts managers to genuinely commit to suitably translate a model's discourse and adapt its practices to the local context, which promotes members' understanding and acceptance of the model's philosophy and expedites the smooth implementation of its practices.

"Contextual adaptation" therefore refers to the mindful and intentional organisational-level adaptation of a new management model to national and organisational specificities and is recommended towards both the discourse and the practices of new management models. This adoption behaviour – epitomised by the ideal, well-adjusted Interpreter profile – allows the organisation to benefit from both the new models' technical/performance improvements and its symbolic associations. All other profiles fail to appropriately adapt, or even convincingly adopt either the underlying discourse or the inherent practice of the new model, preventing the organisation from achieving its promised potential. Instead it will incur negative consequences such as employee discontent and cynicism, as well as the missed opportunity to improve organizational effectiveness and boost image and reputation among external stakeholders.

Failure to engage in adequate adaptation efforts may be

unintentional, as managers do not always perceive or control the consequences of their decisions. But it may also partly derive from lack of critical reflection about the decision to adopt a new management model. Raising awareness on these issues thus becomes all the more relevant. When deciding to adopt promising new management models, managers must resist the urge to focus solely on their auspicious advantages and consider also how they will be made to fit the existing local conditions. It is imperative to acknowledge the need to adjust the usually optimistic and persuasive arguments to a discourse that resonates with the local values and concerns, allowing stakeholders to understand and appreciate the expected benefits of a new model. Likewise, managers must take care to adapt the imported new methods and procedures to make them fit into the current routines, that may themselves need to be adjusted. That way, the new practices do not clash with established systems in such a way that they will be rejected, avoided or botched. Concentrating primarily on models for which there is genuine appreciation and generalised consensus may be advisable, as this seems to facilitate these adaptation efforts.

Appreciating managerial agency, we expect this conceptual framework to contribute to raise managers' awareness of the synergetic roles played by discourse and practice in securing the performance and symbolic benefits sought when adopting a new management model, and the importance of critically and

creatively adapting both to their organisation's idiosyncrasies. If this is accomplished from the outset, it is more likely employees will value and become committed to the adopted new model, making it their own. Accordingly, the aspired benefits may be attained early and the negative consequences avoided or minimised.

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